

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please cancel claims 1-13 without prejudice or disclaimer, and substitute new claims 14-28 therefor as follows:

Claims 1-13 (Cancelled).

14. (New) A process for producing a low-attenuation optical fiber, comprising: producing a soot core preform by chemical deposition on a substrate; removing the substrate from the soot core preform, thereby forming a central hole along the soot preform; drying and consolidating the soot core preform to form a glass core preform; and stretching the glass core preform; wherein the step of drying and consolidating comprises reducing the diameter of the central hole and the step of stretching comprises closing the central hole.

15. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein the step of reducing the diameter of the central hole comprises reducing the pressure inside the central hole and subjecting the glass core preform to a temperature sufficient to soften glass.

16. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein the diameter of the central hole at the end of the drying and consolidating step is about 0.05 mm to about 0.4 mm.

17. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein the diameter of the central hole at the end of the drying and consolidating step is about 0.05 mm to about 0.2 mm.

18. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein the diameter of the central hole at the end of the drying and consolidating step is at most 1:10 of an initial diameter of the central hole.

19. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein the step of drying and consolidating is performed in a furnace and includes drying the soot core preform at a first temperature, consolidating the de-hydrated soot core preform at a second temperature higher than the first temperature and subjecting the consolidated core preform to a third temperature higher than the second temperature for reducing said diameter.

20. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein the step of drying and consolidating is performed in a furnace comprising a first zone and a second zone, and comprises the following sequence of steps:

drying the soot core preform in the first zone;

moving the dried soot core preform from the first zone to the second zone;

consolidating the soot core preform in the second zone to form a consolidated core preform;

moving the consolidated core preform from the second zone to the first zone;

reducing the pressure in the central hole;

increasing the temperature in the second zone to a temperature sufficient to soften glass;

moving the consolidated core preform from the first zone to the second zone;

keeping the consolidated core preform in the second zone until the diameter of the central hole has reduced to a desired value; and
removing the consolidated core preform from the furnace.

21. (New) The process according to claim 15, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 200 mBar.

22. (New) The process according to claim 21, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 100 mBar.

23. (New) The process according to claim 20, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 200 mBar.

24. (New) The process according to claim 22, wherein said pressure is reduced to at most 100 mBar.

25. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein reducing the diameter of the central hole comprises subjecting the glass core preform to a temperature of about 1495 °C to about 1540 °C.

26. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein reducing the diameter of the central hole comprises subjecting the glass core preform to a temperature sufficient to soften glass for 1 hour to 3 hours.

27. (New) The process according to claim 14, wherein the soot core preform has a core radius and an external radius, the ratio between the core radius and the external radius being lower than 0.4.

28. (New) The process according to claim 20, further comprising fitting a low-melting temperature member to a lower end of the central hole glass before the step of

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drying, and wherein reducing the pressure in the central hole comprises extracting gas from the central hole from an upper end thereof.